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It's Only a Paper Moon

by Tom McNichol

In James R. Whelan's recurring nightmare, he is standing behind a podium, once again defending his paper, the *Washington Times*, before a group of liberal journalists. The cameras are whirring and the words of the prepared text are tumbling out of his mouth—no, the *Times* is not a Moonie paper, no, the Unification Church has no control over the paper's editorial content.

It's familiar ground for Whelan; he's done this speech a thousand times before. Everything is going smoothly until Whelan skips ahead a few lines in the text

and sees an upcoming sentence that reads, "The Washington Times is a Moonie paper."

Now who the hell put that in there? As editor and publisher of the *Times* since its inception, Whelan has spent the better part of the last three years saying to anyone who cared to listen that the *Times'* backer, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, has no control whatsoever over what goes in the paper. The *Times*, Whelan was fond of saying, is really no different than the *Christian Science Monitor*—another paper financed by a church, but "more independent of its ownership than any newspaper in this country."

But there's that sentence, right on the page in front of him—"The *Times* is a Moonie paper." This is where the dream starts to turn ugly. The TV lights are beating down on him, blanching his face white, illuminating the beads of sweat on his forehead, and the liberal journalists are leaning forward in their seats, waiting to see if he's going to say the sentence that's been on their lips since the paper was launched.

Whelan takes a deep breath and pauses, hoping the nightmare will end here so he can wake up in the warm confines of his ballroom-sized office at the *Times*, delivered from his enemies.

But the dream won't end, and Whelan glances down at the text and resigns himself to the inevitable. The words are spoken haltingly, as though extracted from his mouth one by one with a pair of pliers—"The *Times* is a Moonie paper."

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